

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 9, 2011

Agenda Item: Fish Creek WMA–DNRC Fire Road Restoration Project

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

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Background

In the Fish Creek drainage, and within portions of the Fish Creek WMA, FWP proposes to coordinate with Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to remove existing roads, and exchange and abandon road easements as part of their Fish Creek Road Restoration Project.

Fish Creek and its tributaries supports the strongest runs of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout within the 120-mile reach of the middle Clark Fork watershed, with many of its streams also supporting genetically pure, resident westslope cutthroat trout. The Wig Creek drainage of the Project area provides important elk winter range for the Burdette Creek elk herd, as well as seasonal habitat for white-tailed deer, mule deer and moose. The roads proposed for removal run through wet areas and are at risk for failure or sediment delivery to streams that contribute flow to Fish Creek and the South Fork of Fish Creek.

The project will include DNRC permanently closing about 1,227 feet of road, 13,323 feet on FWP lands, and building 2,057 feet of new road on the Fish Creek WMA. Road restoration will result in a net decrease of 1,266 feet of road within the Fish Creek WMA, with no on-the-ground costs to FWP.

Because of the proposed road removals, DNRC also is requesting about 1.2 miles of road access easements across existing roads on FWP lands, and recommending FWP abandon 0.2 miles of road easements on DNRC lands in exchange for 0.3 miles of road easement elsewhere. Alternative access routes were designed to use existing roads, to avoid high risk sites, and to decrease the overall road prism in the Fish Creek drainage.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Formal public involvement would follow the FWP Commission's endorsement. DNRC would take the lead on the EA, with FWP providing support.

Alternatives and Analysis

This proposal reflects the need to decrease the overall road prism within the Fish Creek drainage to protect water quality, the bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout fishery, and winter range for elk, moose, white-tailed deer and mule deer.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

If completed, the Fish Creek Fire Road Restoration Project would decrease the road density and associated maintenance on the Fish Creek WMA. It also would improve water quality within the drainage, and provide additional big game habitat security within important winter range.

Proposed Motion:

Move that the commission endorse FWP's proposal to pursue the opportunity to decrease the road prism on the Fish Creek WMA and exchange road easements with DNRC.